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Testimony of Rep. Mary Mushinsky (85th) In Support of
CT DEEP Parks and the Council on Environmental Protection

Before Appropriations Committee, Conservation and Development Subcommittee
March 2, 2015 6:00 p.m.

Parks and Forests

The Program Review and Investigations Committee in December 2013 issued our report on the State Parks system. We documented deterioration of the network of state parks and forests and recommended specific staff additions plus a more sustainable funding model based on the best practices of other states. Specifically, we recommended a heavier reliance on income-generating services such as cabin rentals and deposit of revenues into the park systems' existing maintenance fund. We advised harnessing the energy of park managers toward the goal of increasing concessions that raise park incomes. These practices in other states have helped stabilize services.

Now, despite our report, the Governor's budget cuts the parks system by 25%. This is the easier path to make up a budget shortfall due to the seasonal nature of most park workers, who do not share full time worker contract protections. But As PRI's report documented, fewer staff leads to park system neglect which generates higher costs for maintenance. Eventually, public safety concerns force the state to consider park closings. This is unnecessary and tragic as the PRI report has laid out a better path to state park self-sufficiency.

The park and forest system has passed the century mark. The state parks provide low cost family relaxation and a healthful escape from stressful urban lives. The state forests generate renewable resources. The Appropriations Committee in 2014 partially restored

park personnel, but did not accept PRI's language to stabilize the system. Please reconsider our recommendations and save the state park and forest network.

Council on Environmental Quality

This proposed budget cut has appeared in other tight budget years. This year's proposed cut has a new guise: move the council to legislative management without funding it, a clear attempt to kill it. Council on Environmental Quality is the state's environmental watchdog and trend tracker. Through 35 years this small office with its volunteer board has been the first responder for environmental problems, alerting legislators and CT DEEP when challenges are building and need the state's attention. The CEQ is separate and independent from DEEP and cannot be muzzled. Their annual report tracks both environmental progress and areas of failure. For the small sum involved, why would we silence CEQ's unflinching honesty?